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The heat is on

The Pacific Ocean is primed to produce another El Nino year that could bring severe weather, UH scientists say

By Jim Borg
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A warm-water mass churning across the tropical Pacific points to the development of a periodic phenomenon that typically brings destructive weather across far reaches of the planet, two University of Hawaii scientists warn.

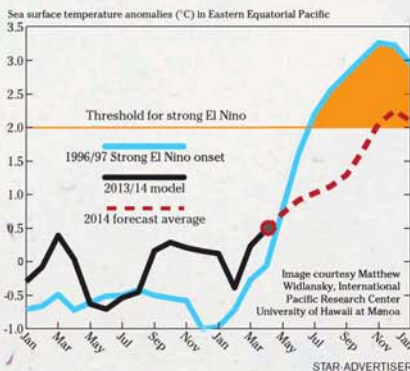
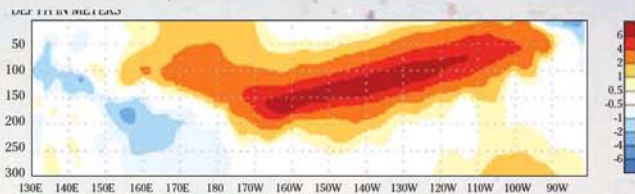
"I think the system is really primed for a big El Nino," says Axel Timmermann, a professor of oceanography with the International Pacific Research Center. "I would say there is an 80 percent chance that a big El Nino will develop by the end of the year."

Just how powerful the phenomenon will be is the subject of intense debate within scientific circles, Timmermann said in a telephone interview.

"The big discussion is if it will develop into a strong El Nino," he said. "You will find members of the scientific community who are more conservative in their estimates and less conservative."

Please see EL NINO, A8

Hurricanes Iwa in 1982 and Iniki in 1992, which both devastated Kauai, occurred during El Nino years. Below, at the height of its power with maximum sustained winds of 145 mph, the Category 4 Iniki kicks up debris in Lihue near the Civic Center.



THE TROPICAL PACIFIC IS PRIMED FOR EL NINO
A huge body of heated subsurface water is plodding eastward across the tropical Pacific, as shown in the depth profile above. The scale above right depicts degrees Celsius above normal. Computer models of the effects of this heat vary, but so far the temperatures in the eastern equatorial Pacific resemble those in the run-up to the powerful 1997 El Nino, as shown at left.



BRUCE ASATO / BASATO@STARADVERTISER.COM / SEPT. 11, 1992 PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BRYANT FUKUTOMI / BFUKUTOMI@STARADVERTISER.COM

Prediction of Kakaako measure's failure riles senator

Galuteria chides Saiki about assuring protesters there are irreconcilable differences over the bill

By Derrick DePledge
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In a rare public outburst, state Senate Majority Leader Brickwood Galuteria on Thursday lashed out at state House Majority Leader Scott Saiki for implying that a bill that would allow the state Office of Hawaiian Affairs to pursue residential development near the waterfront in Kakaako is dead before conference committee negotiations have started.

Galuteria said he was "incensed" by Saiki's comments Tuesday that there would likely be irreconcilable differences in conference committee that would prevent the bill from becoming law. Saiki was speaking to community activists who had staged a protest at the state Capitol against OHA's plans for residential development in Kakaako makai.

The House approved the bill Tuesday, setting up a possible conference committee with the Senate.

"This bill is dead on arrival? We already have irreconcilable differences with the Senate? What would that be? They agreed to our bill," Galuteria (D, Kakaako-McCully-Waikiki) said on the Senate floor. "So is it a forgone conclusion that the House is going to kill something that they just agreed on? Is that how we do business here in this house? Is that how we do business here in the Legislature?"

Saiki (D, Downtown-Kakaako-McCully) said House leaders have never said that the bill is "dead on arrival."

"We expect that it will go to conference committee, and at that point (the negotiators) will have to weigh the pros and cons of the bill and make a

Please see OHA, A8

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STAR-ADVERTISER / JAN. 8, 1997

Surfers took advantage of high waves at the Ala Moana Bows surf spot during the 1997-98 El Nino, the largest event of its kind in recorded history. University of Hawaii oceanography professor Axel Timmermann said a big El Nino he expects sometime this year could bring larger than normal North Shore waves.

EL NINO: 'No way to know' whether more storms in store

Continued from A1

But he said it's his opinion that the El Nino will rival the one that occurred in 1997-98, the largest event of its kind in recorded history.

What is worrying scientists are abnormally warm subsurface conditions in a region called Nino 3, southwest of Hawaii.

"It's an enormous amount of heat," Timmermann said.

By one estimate, published in the online magazine Slate, the heated water would cover the United States to a depth of 300 feet.

The temperature anomaly is accompanied by strong westerly winds.

When the water mass reaches the surface, which it could later this year, the heat would be released into the atmosphere, creating the potential for "devastating impacts," Timmermann said.

More conservative in its prediction is the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center, based in College Park, Md.

In a report issued Thursday, it said the chances of an El Nino developing will top 50-50 by summer.

Many computer models are predicting an El Nino sometime during the summer or fall, the center said.

"Despite this greater model consensus, there remains considerable uncertainty as to when El Nino will develop and how strong it may become."

In agreement with Tim-

mermann is Fei-Fei Jin, a UH professor of meteorology.

"The subsurface heat content is very, very substantial," he said Thursday. "Most people are still cautious, but we have a bunch of experts here on the campus who have been very watchful of this for over a month and we are thinking it could be a pretty serious one."

In Hawaii the results could mean a dry winter and wet summer, forecasters say.

"The subsurface heat content is very, very substantial. Most people are still cautious, but we have a bunch of experts here on the campus who have been very watchful of this for over a month and we are thinking it could be a pretty serious (El Nino)."

Fei-Fei Jin
University of Hawaii professor of meteorology

"Every El Nino is a little bit different," said Robert Ballard, science and operations officer with the National Weather Service in Honolulu. "But there are some patterns we can expect to see. For Hawaii what we tend to see is the weather pattern during the summer and fall becomes favorable for more tropical cyclones to develop in the central Pacific. That does

not mean that more tropical cyclones will threaten Hawaii. There is no way to know that."

Hurricanes Iwa in 1982 and Iniki in 1992 occurred during El Nino years.

And the 1997 Pacific hurricane season was one of the deadliest and most destructive, although Hawaii was spared.

Hurricane Pauline killed several hundred people and caused widespread damage in southeastern Mexico.

Hurricanes Linda and Guillermo reached Category 5 strength but fortunately never made landfall.

If an El Nino develops, it would likely peak in early winter, Jin and Timmermann said. In fact, the name El Nino, which translates to "the child," refers to Christmas, its traditional peak.

That should trigger larger than normal North Shore surf.



Axel Timmermann:
The oceanography professor with the University of Hawaii's International Pacific Research Center says there is an 80 percent chance that a big El Nino will develop by the end of the year

"We'll have higher waves, better conditions for the pro surfers," Timmermann said.

"During a typical El Nino, California sees more rainfall, but if the rain comes down in torrential downpours, it could be destabilizing," he added.

By contrast, Indonesia and western Australia could see drought.

As the water moves eastward, the sea level will drop around Samoa and Tonga and other parts of the western Pacific, possibly by more than a foot, exposing shallow reefs, Timmermann said.

"All the organic material on the reef starts to smell," he said. "The Samoans actually have a word for this: 'taimasa,' smelly reef. They hate it."

Latest signal not jet's, Australian official says

New York Times

SYDNEY >> Australian authorities searching for the missing Malaysia Airlines plane said Friday that the latest potential signal was probably not from the flight recorders, despite hopes raised the previous day.

A sensor dropped into the sea by a Royal Australian Air Force plane detected a possible acoustic signal in the same area of the Indian Ocean where a search ship had earlier detected signals that might have come from the flight recorders of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, Australian authorities overseeing the search said Thursday.

The latest potential clue to the whereabouts of the aircraft came in the same area off Western Australia where the Ocean Shield, an Australian ship, had col-

lected four sets of signals that could have come from beacons attached to the plane's two flight recorders.

Yet Angus Houston, the retired air chief marshal overseeing the search, said in an emailed statement Friday that "an initial assessment of the possible signal detected by a RAAF AP-3C Orion aircraft yesterday afternoon has been determined as not related to an aircraft underwater locator beacon."

He discounted expectations of an impending announcement on the recorders, which are crucial to determining what caused the plane to disappear March 8.

Speaking in China, however, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott appeared confident that previous signals detected by the Ocean Shield did come from the flight recorders' beacons.

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OHA: Opponents of agency's Kakaako plan are promoting 'fallacies,' Galuteria says

Continued from A1

recommendation," he said.

Saiki, who posed for a photograph with the protesters Tuesday, said his comments that day were meant to convey that the House understood the dynamic of the bill. "So they shouldn't be worried about that, because we understood what the pros and cons were," he said.

Both Galuteria and Saiki represent Kakaako and have been pulled into the intense debate over rapid development in the region. The flare-up could be a prelude to difficult negotiations on a bill that straddles questions of growth, land conservation, equity and Native Hawaiian rights.

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs received land in Kakaako makai in a \$200 million settlement with the state in 2012 over former crown land.

But a state law passed in 2006 prohibits residential development in Kakaako makai. A collection of community activists and surfers persuaded the Legislature to pass the law after Alexander & Baldwin Inc. proposed a project that included high-rise condominiums.

Dozens of Native Hawaiian activists have appeared at the Legislature in favor of OHA's ability to develop the land. OHA would have to gain project approval from the Hawaii Community Development Authority.

The HCDA would impose association fees on residential development that would finance services and projects, including free public parking for park users and public beach access.

makers to choose between two vocal and politically active interest groups in an election year.

Galuteria, in his Senate floor speech, sought to address what he called "fallacies" spread by opponents of OHA's development strategy. The senator said opponents have decried the potential for shoreline development when the OHA parcels are almost a half-mile from the waterfront.

He said some have complained about a loss of access to the waterfront for recreation yet have overlooked the association fees in Senate Bill 3122 that could help preserve access.

But Galuteria's main message was for Saiki, his counterpart in the House.

"So I hope my words are



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